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The VALLEY of The GREAT RAY

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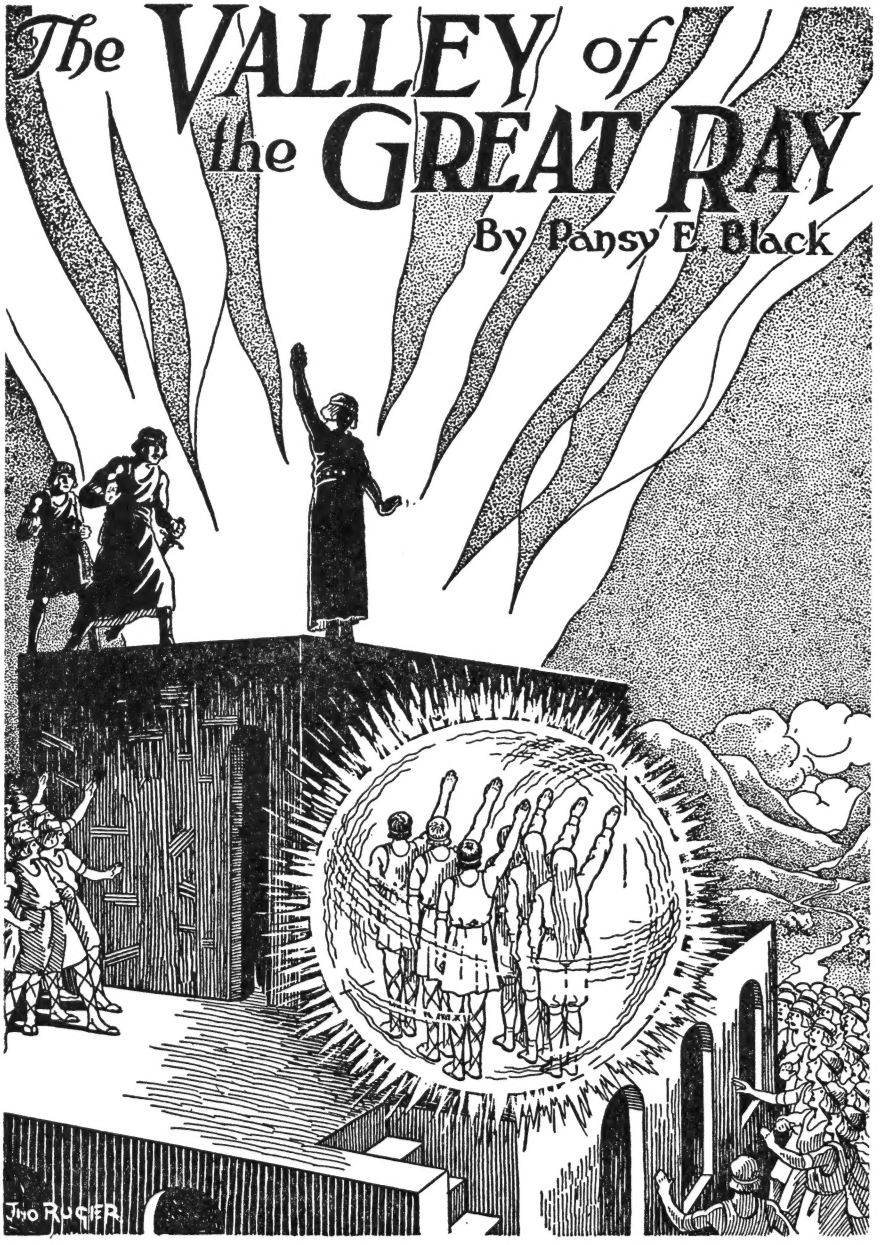

(Illustration by Ruger)

Enclosing the six was a great globe of intense rose flame, shot through and through with whirling gold. The group raised their hands in farewell.

The Valley of The Great Ray

by Pansy E. Black

BLUE moonlight flooded the camp. From the water hole came an occasional scream which made the blacks cower about their little fire and mutter, "Bunyip!"

Three white men, some yards distant around another fire, were talking in low tones. Friends and war buddies, they had come into this "never never" land because Sandy's father had wished it. They were Sandy—Alexander McCray, tall, angular, and as Scotch as his name; Thomas Donovan, not quite so tall, blue-eyed, black-haired, Irish; Clare Travis, native of Australia, world adventurer, bearing a white scar on one cheek. A sand storm which had lasted three days had driven them out of their route. There had been days when it was too dark to see your hand before your face out in the full sweep of it. Now they were discussing their position and immediate future plans. Presently Sandy yawned. "Isn't this the last place on earth? Anything could happen here. I've been hearing Dad talking all evening."

"In that case," drawled Tom, "suppose you tell us the story again. Maybe he will add to it, since we *are* here."

Sandy leaned forward to put another stick on the fire as he remarked irrelevantly, "That hunk of iron is on top again," indicating a dark nodule just in range of the light.

Clare smiled; "Yeh, I've been watching it, coming up for air. Hot air. No disrespect of course, either to you or your parent, Sandy. Let's hear the yarn."

"There isn't any yarn. He was dying and spoke of the place where people didn't grow old. He said he saw a fellow from the valley in Sydney. He was smooth-faced, young and vigorous, but he told Dad he was nearly two hundred years old."

"And your father believed him?"

"No. But later he saw the valley, and some other people, both men and women; and all were young."

"Saw them?" Clare raised himself on an elbow. "Didn't he go into the valley?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"For the same reason that we probably shan't."

"And that is. . .?"

"Wait and see."

When they made camp the next night, Clare, in charge of the black fellows, because he understood their language, announced that they would hereafter travel at night.

They were well into the middle of the great desert and had become thoroughly acquainted with its queerness. Hollow trees with their bark on the inside, fruits with their stones

outside, strange iron nodules which apparently no force on earth could keep below the surface of the sand, had become commonplace. They even found themselves sharing their boys' superstitions about demons and bunyips who haunted water holes to trap unwary travellers. And when Clare said that gold, silver, and precious stones of all kinds lay just under the surface of the shifting sands, they believed him, especially when, more than once, in digging holes to the water level, they found rubies, emeralds and sapphires among the pebbles.

The Flame

SO when Clare made his announcement, Sandy merely raised an inquiring eyebrow. "Because the blacks refuse to travel farther by day?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"That remains to be seen. I imagine we are nearing our destination."

The next night they rested for an hour on the edge of a small depression some two or three hundred yards across. The moonlight had a vivid blue tinge, the air about them was still; though far away they could hear the ceaseless throbbing of a *ghingi-ghingi*, calling the black fellows to a *pidcherri jamborree*. While they rested, Clare, keeping a sharp eye on the natives, told them that the young men would eat this *pidcherie* and then dance on live coals for hours. If they showed any sign of pain they were disqualified for manhood and usually killed.

"How often does that happen?" Tom asked.

"Frequently, I suppose. Our opiates, you know, have no effect on some people. It all depends. But let's move on. Our blacks are getting uneasy."

At the bottom of the ridge a surprise awaited them. In the far distant past, this valley had been part of the ocean floor. Now it was a mass of salt crystals; and as they crushed the first ones under foot, lines of multi-colored fire sprang from the cracks far across the valley. Red, blue, green, purple, orange and yellow flame spread and glowed in the blue moonlight.

"What on earth—" demanded Tom.

"Very much on earth," Clare stooped and gathered a double handful of the salt. But turn it over as he might, no fire lay in his palms. He laughed at their amazement and threw the mass outward and upward. Glory, fire and beauty sprang thru the air and fell at their feet.

"Opals," he explained. "Too tiny to be of value. Hardly to be seen, but there, just the same. Wonderful, isn't it?" As they crossed the valley, they agreed. It was like walking on the broken rainbows of a hundred storms—beautiful, mystical, unfathomable.

Two nights later they reached a ridge of boulders of ironstone, with holes that emitted unpleasant gases. Tom and Sandy would have crossed had not the blacks objected strenuously. "Believe it or not," Clare interpreted. "They say it isn't safe."

"Ask them why."

"They say that here the noise of light which is instant death strikes first."

"Gibberish." Tom spoke with his habitual drawl, then his eyes opened wide. Overhead a sound like the lowest note of the scale came thru the stillness. At the gentle, muted noise, the blacks dropped flat. Higher and higher rose the note till it passed the vibrations of audible sound. Then, as they watched, the boulders of the ridge became visible in a glare of intense red light which seemed capable of fusing them.

Then it snapped off abruptly, and after a second they heard the faint high vibration begin. It grew lower and lower till it died entirely.

A New Surprise

IN utter amazement they stared at each other. Finally Clare spoke. "I reckon we travel single-footed from here. The blacks will never face that."

"Is that the meaning of their present eloquence?" asked Tom. He jerked his thumb in the direction of the blacks who were yelling in a queer rhythm at the top of their lungs.

"No. That's a hymn to the mysterious Bunyip."

"I'm going to the top and see what is beyond," announced Sandy.

"I must refuse to permit it," drawled Tom. "The next act is on."

The same note preceded a wavering orange flame which shook and vibrated as though held in a giant hand. Then, just before the sun rose, the note came with no light following it and Sandy had to be almost forcibly restrained from investigating. A few minutes later Clare returned from a session with the blacks.

"Gad, Sandy, these boys say that that last was a discharge of black light which kills in five seconds by the watch."

"There's no sich animile as 'black light'," drawled Tom.

"That's what you said about blue moonlight, too," retorted Clare. "But you found it just the same."

"Boys, boys," interposed peace-loving Sandy. "Do you think there is anything to be gained by night travel, if we must leave the blacks?"

"I sure do," answered Tom. "If it's all the same to you, I want to see just where any more fireworks are coming. They are brighter at night."

So the day was spent in dismissing the blacks, cacheing what goods they could not carry, and examining the ridge

where the light had struck. When they reached the top, they expected to be able to see from where the mysterious lights had come; but nothing was in sight except ridges, sandy, salty valleys, mulga scrub—nothing that they had not seen before. And though they made their camp with a good deal of uneasiness, the night was like any other desert night—calm and still.

After a lengthy discussion it was finally agreed to continue in the same general direction they had been travelling, and to keep their eyes open for developments. The first one came that night when they stopped to dig a water hole and boil a little coffee. Sandy set to work on the hole and Tom was getting out the pot and cups when he chanced to look toward the farther side of the little depression. He dropped his things and began running toward the ridge. Clare, after a glance, followed him.

Lying among the boulders was a young man upon his back, his arms outstretched, as though in the last stages of exhaustion. He was clothed in a white robe which reached his knees. On his feet were sandals of smooth, white, thick cloth, the lacings reaching to the thigh. His arms were bare except for a gold armlet above the elbow. Across his chest, under one arm and over the other, was a broad singlet of the same white cloth, to which a small pouch was fastened. His hair hung below his shoulders and was confined by another gold band in which glowed a single ruby.

Clare and Tom attempted to raise him but after a look at his face realized he was too near his end to be disturbed. His eyes were shut, but his lips were fluttering. They made out a single word, repeated over and over. "English? English?"

Clare bent over him. "Yes, we are English. Is that what you wanted to know, old man?"

"Thanks to the Great Ray," breathed the dying man. "Message in pouch from my father, Tomber. He sent me out. The vengeance of Robern followed."

"Are you from the Valley of the Rays?" asked Clare.

"Yes, but go not there. Robern will kill you as he has me. Keep out . . ." his breath fluttered, he moved uneasily, then lay still as a low-pitched note came thru the night.

CHAPTER II

The Burial

WITHOUT ceremony they lifted and bore the body of the dead man back to camp and away from the ridge where deadly rays would soon be playing. But though the note sounded several times that night, no light followed. They could only surmise that the "black light" was used. However, they were too busy discussing their find and the letter in the dead man's pouch to notice much that went on

above them. The letter read:

> "You who receive this will do so after my son, Carent, is dead, for he has orders to deliver it to none while he lives. I know that before you receive it, therefore, the Black Light will have done its work. Whoever you are, if English or Scots, I would beg you to come to the border of the Valley of the Ray and let me send to you my daughter, Ilias the Beautiful. Do what you will with the body of my son but bring his armlet and headband that Ilias may know you as my messengers. May the Great Ray be beneficent to you.
>
> Tomber, the Aged."

"'Tomber, the Aged'? How come?" queried Tom as he finished reading. "I thought everybody in that valley was young."

"It seems there are exceptions," remarked Sandy dryly. "Well, shall we go on?"

"Go on?" Clare was amazed. "Why not? We have almost reached our goal, if this is any indication."

An exclamation from Tom made them turn. He was pointing to the body of Carent. The golden hair had turned white, wrinkles were appearing on the smooth face, the skin of the arms and hands were shrinking, and, as they watched, in a few minutes the body of an old man lay before them. "I guess his father *must* be 'The Aged'. Let's put him out of sight before we decide on anything."

It was a simple burial preceded by the removal of the head band and the armlet. They dug a hole eight feet deep and, covering Carent's face with the scarf he had worn, filled the grave with fine sand and covered it with boulders.

Ilias

IT was three nights later. They had finished their supper and were lounging in semi-darkness waiting for the moon to rise. Clare sat up with a shrug. "I'm beginning to think this whole thing a wild goose chase, for a fact. Here we are, three days' march from Carent's grave, and nothing yet. And our supplies are about out. What do you fellows think?"

"I've been watching the top of the cliff yonder for some time. I shouldn't wonder if that's our messenger coming toward us now," Sandy rose to his feet as he spoke, and went toward the figure standing below the top of the cliff.

Before he reached her, the moon rose and showed him the face of a young girl, so wondrously lovely that he almost gasped. Golden hair brushed her knees; her eyes were deeply violet, her face the oval some of the old masters painted for their Virgins. He spoke gently, "You are Ilias, daughter of Tomber, the Aged?"

She smiled and raised her right hand, placing it first on

her heart and then on top of her head, a salute they later learned was common to the people of the Ray. "Yes, and you?" she asked.

Sandy took the armlet from his pocket and held it toward her. "Do you know this?"

She nodded. "That belongs to Carent, my brother. Have you seen him?"

Sandy hesitated. "Yes, he is dead."

"What is that?"

"He has no life."

"You mean he has been gathered to the Ray?"

"Yes," taking the easiest way out.

"Father said he would be," she remarked thoughtfully.

The boys took a moment to digest her statement before Sandy remarked, "We came to see the Valley."

"Oh, but that is impossible, at least I think so. Nobody comes into the valley and only one or two have ever gone out that I know of."

"You're out."

"Yes, but you see Father has given me more of the Ray than I should have, so I go where I please. What I mean is that one is allowed to go outside the valley but once in fifty years. Father went to a settlement of the barbarians they call Sydney a long time ago, but he's the last."

"What about Carent?"

Ilias shrugged. "I don't understand about him, except that the Council would not authorize his going and Father got him out some way."

"How do you propose to get back? And where is this Valley?" Sandy asked.

Ilias laughed again, as she pointed to the Cliff which sloped to her feet. "Behind that. If you will go to the right for the length of a ray's sweep you will find a small ridge from which you can see part of it."

"But how do you get in?"

"Walk in," and Clare saw a mischevious light in her eyes.

"Suppose we walk with you," suggested Tom.

"I don't think you will. Not even the birds can."

"Will you take a note to your father?"

"That is why he sent me."

When Sandy had finished the note, she took it in both her hands, and with an agility they were far from emulating, she sprang up the hillside until she had almost reached the summit. Then she was gone.

The boys had barely established themselves on the small hill overlooking a long low opening in the cliff, when the moon set and nothing further could be observed. They noted some kind of a searchlight which played from a high eminence inside the opening, accompanied by a crackling and snapping

noise.

Daylight found them looking through their glasses at a most amazing spectacle.

The Valley of the Rays was a deep circular depression between high volcanic cliffs, with a river running around three sides of it. The cliffs were green to their summits, and vegetation of a bright, unnatural yellow-green clothed the valley proper. There were no trees; but from cliff to cliff an awning of pale green fluttered and wavered as though blown by a strong breeze. The torrid sun of central Australia, which was at that moment scorching their backs, could not penetrate this canopy under which a cool shade formed the normal atmosphere.

In the center of the valley rose a building of bright green stone which shimmered and gleamed even in the shade. It was fifty stories in height; each was set back, leaving a small platform fifteen feet square at the top. The top was very nearly on a level with the top of the cliff. The middle of the platform was hollow, with a runway, over which shot a refulgent, resplendent, many-colored cone of light, perpetually turning, perpetually changing color and snapping and crackling as it moved.

On the platform below they saw figures in white, bowing and bending ceremonially, with their faces toward the cone. Presently two of them left the others, and, climbing a flight of steps on the side away from the watchers, gained the platform beside the flame. Here they stood for a moment, then, with outstretched arms, walked straight into the cone, which enlarged to receive them. A moment later, when it resumed its normal shape, the two men had disappeared.

"Ye Gods, what was that? An execution or a voluntary sacrifice or. . . "

"Ask of the winds," sighed Clare. "I'm more eager than ever to get inside. And I don't as yet see a thing to prevent us from doing it."

"You will." Sandy spoke in so significant a tone that they quickly raised their glasses.

CHAPTER III
Ready To Enter

THE worshippers on the forty-ninth story had descended without haste to the fortieth, and were waiting. Presently, from all the stories above them, what looked like the muzzles of cannon were outthrust, while the cone of light whirled more swiftly and seemed to drain off its oranges and reds. At the same time the cliff-sides began to glow with vivid light, intense, blazing; red, orange, and gray, as the ray tubes were lifted till their discharges touched the edge of the canopy and rested on the cliff-tops. There they stayed, pouring their inexhaustible supply of power against

the outer world. But after a moment the cone resumed its natural color.

Night came, and the rays were dimmed, shadowing the Valley, though the great cone flamed with undiminished splendor. Midnight had passed, and they were about to give up the vigil when Ilias appeared beside them. How she had gotten there, they could not imagine, since they had not seen her come over the cliff or through the gash.

She came to them swiftly and dropped on Sandy's knees three robes such as Carent had worn. "Father says to put these on. I will arrange jewels for you so that at this time of night you may pass for our people. You must be within the House of the Ray before daylight or you will be—what is the word you used? Oh yes, dead."

Twenty minutes later the three emerged from their tent, having taken time to shave before donning the robes, and were amazed to see how well the costumes became them. Ilias hastily arranged their hair, confining it with the gold bands, and, clasping an armlet on the upper arm of each, motioned them to follow her. Down to the cleft they went; but she turned aside, pointing to a dark hole in the side of the cliff.

"This leads to the court of the House of the Ray. Go through it and take part in the ceremony tonight. Before day breaks a guide will be sent who will take you to my father. I go this way." And before they could detain her, she had vanished.

For a moment the three looked at each other and then laughed. "Well, here goes," muttered Sandy, "nothing venture, nothing have," and moved forward.

The path at first was dark, but the footing was smooth and the air fresh. Presently a green glow appeared gradually on either side, accompanied by a force that had the same effect as an overdose of oxygen. Recognizing what was happening, they slowed down. "If we rush into the square acting like school boys let out for a treat, we defeat ourselves," said Clare. "We must slow down, breathe deeply and take things easy."

The advice was good and they followed it, to be rewarded in a short time by a passing away of the exhilaration and a feeling of renewed energy. On and on they went, winding into the bowels of the mountain, and suddenly Tom spoke. "That valley, boys, is a crater of an old volcano, and that cone, I'll bet my new sandals, is the remains of the last eruption. What say?"

"Brilliant, brilliant. I've noticed one thing. I haven't wanted a smoke since I started."

Sandy shook his head. "I'll bet it has a radio-active base to it."

At the House

BEFORE the others could comment on his statement, the passage gave an abrupt turn and they were at the valley entrance, on the edge of a large throng that packed the square from corner to corner, with the House of the Ray more than half a mile away from them. Every story of the House was crowded with white-robed figures, while high on the topmost platforms were a ring of them around the Great Ray.

"How are we going to get across?" murmured Tom and a voice answered. "When the ceremony is ended friends, I will take you, but it would be fatal to try before."

At his elbow stood a tall, slender, amber-eyed young person whose hair fell below the shoulders, but something in the very posture revealed her sex. "You are?" he asked.

"Marial, daughter of Tomber the Aged." Then as he would have spoken, she put a finger on her lips and pointed to the cone. He gasped.

Gradually, like an unfolding flower, the thing was drooping downward, as if from the very stars themselves. Down and down its great fire petals came, separating as they did so; each with a brilliant clear, wondrous, splendor of its own —till they were resting on the tips of the cliff about the valley, and spreading out gradually till they touched. Then began a magnificent rain of colored fire, though the boys thought that none but yellow and green actually reached the throng of people on the valley floor, who bent lower and lower under the living spray.

The three aliens were flung backward into the passage and held there by that mighty play of force, though they, too, felt the same exhilaration they had experienced when first encountering the green light. How long the display lasted they did not know, but presently the force lessened and they went to the entrance again. Now the flower petals had risen above the valley rim, and gradually the cone closed and the ceremony was over.

Marial touched Sandy's arm. "Come," she said. "We have no time to lose. If Robern reaches the third terrace before we reach the entrance, we are lost."

With marvelous swiftness—considering the still packed condition of the square—they threaded their way thru it. Nearer, and the great House loomed. Presently they were under the arched entrance, and then the great doors which had stood open till now closed behind them and Marial paused smiling. "We are safe for the present," she said. "Follow me."

Down the great hall whose top was lost in gloom, thru narrow branching corridors, under groined arches and massive entrances she led the way into what looked like a very

small room and motioned them to enter. They obeyed, and the elevator, for such it proved to be, shot noiselessly upward, but with a speed which left them breathless, then out and along more corridors till they came to a great door carved with serpents of amazing size and length, from whose coils shot continually sparks of fire which vanished upward to the ceiling, hidden by a murky cloud. Marial stopped. "The reason Father wanted you in the square at the ceremony is that you could not have entered here unless you had had some measure of the Ray. I am amazed, as it is, at the easy way in which you move. Have you felt no difficulty?"

"Only like an undertow when wading in a river," admitted Clare. "But I thought nothing of it."

"And now?" laying a hand on the serpent door and turning a knob.

They staggered a little but managed to walk smoothly. She nodded. "I was afraid Father would have to come out to you," she said. "And he hasn't been out of this room, he tells me, in fifty years."

"Ye gods, stay in the same place fifty years? What's he made of?" drawled Tom.

"He is of the essence of the Ray," reprovingly, "and he would be young, but Robern will not allow him to attend the ceremony in the square. And what does 'ye gods' mean?"

The door meanwhile was slowly sinking to the floor, admitting into the corridor a flood of golden light. A voice from within answered her question, "It means the same, daughter of mine, as our 'praise to the great Ray'. Welcome, friends."

The three crossed the threshold and stopped in awe. One side of the great room shone with the rushing flames of the great cone. The other sides formed an arc. Seated in the center was a man of extraordinary height and girth. He rose as they came toward him, and showed he was seven feet four inches in height, and more than two feet across the waist. His hair was snow white, bound with what looked like a circle of jewelled fire. His long robe reached his feet, and was held by a belt of jewels of price. His arms were bare, muscular and vigorous. He seemed in the prime of life, yet his daughter said he had not left this room for fifty years.

"Welcome, my friends, I say again, to the Valley of the Great Ray." As he spoke the last words he turned to the flame beside him. "Thy blessing, O Mighty One." He dropped a handful of a powder over the flame.

To the unutterable amazement of the visitors a great ball of rose-colored fire shot with gold rushed from the heart of the flame past the priest's outstretched hands, played about them a moment, and then returned.

"You look a question, my friends,' continued Tomber.

"Anything I can I will gladly answer."

Clare smiled. "We have any number, if my friends are like myself, but I will confine myself to one. Is this great House carved from one block of stone?"

"No. It grew together as it was built; how, I may not tell you."

CHAPTER IV
The Parchment

TOMBER smiled as he motioned them to stools near him. "I am a barbarian of the outer darkness, my friends. I know hate, love, gratitude and even adoration of Those Who rule the destinies of men; and because I do I am an outcast from my people. But may I not know your names?" When they were mentioned he seemed interested only in their given names, repeating them thoughtfully. "Clare, name of wisdom. Thomas, man of impulse. Alexander, staunch and true. I knew another Alexander many years ago when I was out. Alexander—the other name has slipped me."

"Could it have been McCray?" Sandy asked.

Tomber's eyebrows drew together thoughtfully. "It might have been. Why?"

And Sandy told again his father's story of the valley where men do not grow old. Tomber smiled. "Perhaps it was he. I talked with him but a few minutes, and I was indeed very near two hundred years old at the time."

"Then you must be. . . "

"Nearly two hundred and fifty years, yes. Tell me, do many men in the outer countries live to that age?"

"I never heard of any."

Tomber's eyes twinkled. He picked up a plate of some gray metal from the table beside him and held it out toward them. "Try and bend it," he commanded. One by one they made the effort. All failed.

The old priest took it back, and with a single twist of his fingers reduced it to a spiral, then tossed it into the flaming cone at his elbow. It vanished in mist. "Can any of your men do that?" he asked again.

"Hardly."

Tomber changed the subject. "How did you like the playfulness of my little flower in the square a few minutes ago?"

"Did you do it?" asked Clare.

"Did I do what? Bend the cone? No, that is a function that the fire performs of itself once a week. We but take advantage of it. I may be wise, my Clare, but I cannot control cosmic forces." Then, before they could speak again, he rose and extended a hand to his guests. "You will find my daughter outside in the corridor," he said. "Follow her to rest and refreshment. Robern, your enemy and mine, is coming; and while I *could* protect you, I do not care to have

to try just yet. Tomorrow when the sun is past zenith I will see you again. Then I will answer your other questions."

A low-toned gong striking twelve notes aroused them six hours later. Marial entered with food and laughed at their expressions. "Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Ravenous. What time is it? Surely we have not slept the day away?"

"It is but zenith. When you are ready Father would like to talk to you."

When they entered the circular chamber, Tomber looked up from a scroll of parchment and smiled. They noted that back of his chair a queer machine of cloudy amber glass, filled with some liquid, was giving off occasional faint hissing noises from two broad mouths tuned toward the cone.

"Be seated," he said. "I wish first to ask a question. Were you coming to this Valley when Carent stumbled into your camp, or did you come in answer to my summons?"

"We were coming in any case," Sandy answered slowly.

"Thank you. You have relieved my mind. I could not go to rest with so great obligations resting on me as turning you aside from your way of life to serve mine. Now I know the Great Ray drew you and not I. I suppose you still have questions to be answered. First, do any of you recognize this writing?"

Lifting one of the scrolls he extended it to Clare, who shook his head and passed it to Tom. A moment's scrutiny; then Sandy took it. Long he pondered, turning so that the light from the cone fell on it more directly. Presently he looked up. "I should say that this is a sort of Sanskrit, though I have little knowledge of the subject."

"I assume it is not a common language in the outer world," Tomber remarked as he took it back.

"I would scarcely call it a language at all," said McCray slowly. "I know certain of the sacred writings of India are in that tongue, but I am sure few outside of that country are familiar with it."

"Indeed. It is the common language of my country."

Tomber's Story

SANDY looked at him intently, remembering an almost forgotten statement he had heard a lecturer make in London years before.

"Do you mean . . . " he was beginning, when Tomber unrolled another piece of parchment and held it out. "This is my country," he said simply.

Then Sandy knew. "Your country? But it sank beneath Mother Ocean so long ago that in the outer world its very existence is doubted. We have only a tradition left."

"My friend, fresh confirmation is about to be given that it did at one time flourish and nursed every art and science

in its arms. It is even now rising to the sunlight."

He rerolled the parchment and laid it on the table as he continued, "Atlantis will again take her place among the continents—and very soon."

"Please tell us about yourself and how you came to the Valley," asked Tom earnestly. "And whether the cone was always here, and how you come to speak English so well."

"Since the last is the simplest question," said Tomber, with a twinkle in his eye, "I'll answer that first. It has been the policy of the Council that we should always know the language of the people who own the land in which we live, though we may not owe them allegiance."

The visitors smiled. "And as for the cone, which is caused by the disintegration of materials and the consequent shooting out of all of its constituents. . . "

"Radio-active?" Sandy burst in. . .

"I do not know the term," Tomber said, "but it has been here since the recorded history of my country. My people were the scientists of Atlantis, and years before the cataclysm which overwhelmed her, explorers, sent into this ancient land, far more ancient than my own country, discovered this cone. In those days as in this, the upspringing force bent to the valley at the beginning of the week and rose again, making the place a very paradise, since all the colors then played upon it freely; whereas now only yellow and green are allowed to reach the valley floor. I have often speculated on what a people might have evolved had we chosen to continue the first things." He paused and for a time seemed to be looking either into the distant past or the equally distant future, then continued, "We were ordered to experiment with the fire, separate its colors, analyze its forces, control its action if possible, and report once in fifty years our findings to the Society of Royal Scientists. Royalty in those days was by right of attainment, not accident of birth. You understand that we believed we had discovered in these rays the essence of life and health.

"These experiments were made truly and faithfully century after century, and very wonderful they were, as recorded in parchment buried in the archives of this building: archives which will shortly perish, as they should. They are dangerous for the men of little learning in the world today, and would shortly be worthless in any event. With the scientists was sent a priest to keep alive the religion of Atlantis in the hearts of the exiles. I am a descendant of that first priest, as is also Robern, my half-brother.

"Part of the priest's task is to keep the ages of the people in the valley. You understand that here a man may be the father of three or four families of from eight to ten children, for the function of procreation ceases only with death."

"Please, before we go into that: what happened to your people when Atlantis sank?"

"Nothing. By that time we had become a community sufficient unto ourselves. Having discovered the beneficent effects of the Ray on our life and health, we continued to make use of it—in fact, to consider it as the source of all life. Our people are exposed to it very gradually, and as their systems become accustomed to it, they can stand more and more of it."

Then it can't be altogether radio-active," Sandy pondered. "Radium kills the organs."

"But there are surely other forms with different properties," Tom suggested.

"We are a youthful race," Tomber put in. "With women procreation ceases at seventy, in spite of the fact that they still remain young and lovely. He looked intently at the serpent door for a moment, and Marial entered. "Daughter, go ask Ilias to attend me and bring Hasta with her."

About the Cone

A MOMENT later the two lovely women entered. Tomber introduced Hasta and then at a gesture from him the women excused themselves and went out. "Now," he said, "Which is the younger of those two?"

"I should say they were near the same age," answered Clare, thoughtfully.

"Aside from any sentiment, then, you would choose either for a wife if you wished to have children?"

"I think so."

"So did Charmon, but as it happens Hasta is not far from my age. She is my sister by the same mother. Ilias is eighteen."

"My word! And is this the work of the Ray?"

"Yes."

"Do you have many children in the Valley?"

Tomber's eyebrows came together. "Very few, considering the population we have. In fact, the birth rate has fallen so alarmingly that Robern has called a meeting of the Council for three days to discuss the situation and try to devise means to correct it. For that reason you can be quite free in the Valley, and I am sure you will find much of interest, though of course, it can all be seen in less than three days."

"And death?"

"Is simple. The Ray receives those who wish to return to it." He pointed to the uprushing cone beside him.

"I wonder if that is what we saw the other morning?"

"Yes, two of our men went back into the Great Ray."

Tomber rose to his feet, and walked straight toward the Cone of Light. He threw back his head and seemed to be drinking it in; his robes became almost transparent and his

whole body glowed whitely. A moment later he was back in his chair.

"Then the cone does not kill unless you are in it," murmured Sandy.

"That is right."

"Believe I'll try thrusting my arm into it," Sandy spoke half jestingly, but Tomber nodded. "You may approach it at any rate."

After a little hesitation he obeyed, aware at the same time that Tomber's hand was on his shoulder. Then he closed his eyes and swayed forward, and was plucked back by his host.

"You are not quite ready for that, my friend," he said gently.

"Then what happens on top of the House?" persisted Clare, as Sandy sat down.

"We ask our father, the Ray, to receive us, and it does so." Then as he saw another question on his lips, "No, I simply cannot tell you more. You would have to be one of us to understand fully."

"Can anybody go back who wishes to?"

"No. We insist that every woman owes seventy years to the community and every man a hundred. After that they do as they please."

"Couldn't you have protected Carent?" Tom put in suddenly.

"Pardon me if I do not discuss Carent," Tomber answered gently. "Ilias, Marial and Ariel are the children of my old age. I am counting on you to save them from a fate which looms before them. And by the way, Robern is now coming up the outside of the building with his council. Would you like to see him?"

"We certainly would," the three answered eagerly.

CHAPTER V

Robern

TOMBER went to the machine behind his chair and swung its open mouths away from the cone. Its liquid rose till it filled the orifices. He laid his hand over them in turn and they solidified and shone glassily. "Now, friends, if you will step beside me and lay your hands on these rods,"—indicating the place—"we shall see what we shall see."

As they obeyed, the wall in front faded and they were looking across the valley of the Ray to the further hills under the fluttering green canopy. "X-Ray," murmured Tom.

"What is that?" Tomber asked. Tom explained.

"No, Thomas. Our people knew the X-Ray centuries ago and, discovering its weakness, discarded it. This machine uses a mixture of violet and red beyond human sight. You

are looking at things by way of the fourth dimension now. You have acquired *a new sight.*"

"If so, why do not other things disappear, or rather become transparent? They should." Clare was positive.

"So they would, but I have tempered these rays so that you see only through the rooms of the House. Here, by the way, is Robern. What do you think of him?"

Into the range of their vision had stepped a man who paused to look downward. He was not quite as tall as their host, though he would top seven feet without trouble. But his hair was black, and when, a moment later, he turned his gaze toward the House, they saw that his eyes were black also. He was dressed as were the other dwellers in the Valley, except that he wore a belt in which hung a curved sword, with a brightly-jewelled sheath.

"That sword looks as though it might be gold," Sandy mused.

"It is."

"Then what good is it?"

Their host stared at him, then smiled. "I keep forgetting I am talking to men who know the uses or rather abuses of physical force. But I imagine that a sword of tempered gold would be quite as efficacious in combat as any other kind."

"Tempered gold?"

"Certainly."

"I'd like to examine it."

"I'm afraid I can't grant your wish," Tomber said as he swung the machine back into its place, "but perhaps I can show you something that will answer. This dagger is a companion of Robern's sword, and was worn by the leader of the colonists who settled this valley. I use it as a paper weight." He lifted the weapon from among his parchments and handed it to Clare. Silently the three examined it, then handed it back. "The process?" Sandy inquired.

"Has been lost, but I presume a little research would disclose it."

"By the way, why all this astonishment about tempered gold?" Clare wanted to know. "That sort of stuff has been found in both Peru and Yucatan."

"That's so. I had forgotten."

"And why not?" the twinkle appeared in Tomber's eyes again. "Both were daughters of the country that produced this."

"Really?"

"Yes. We scattered in all directions just before the final catastrophe. And now, I want to talk quite personally with you, if you don't mind. I have already said that I wish my daughters were out of the Valley, but at the same time I must

win the decisive victory that shall free them from Robern. If you do not wish to have a hand in this, say so, and I will see that you are out of this place before night."

The boys looked at each other, then Sandy drawled, "It might be interesting. I guess we'll stay till you tell us to go."

"I warn you there is danger," Tomber said earnestly. "Robern already knows of your presence, and guesses quite clearly at your mission. He will try his best to see that you do not leave the valley alive."

Telling them to place themselves in the middle of the room, he began manipulating the apparatus in back of them, until the men felt growing about them a transparent sphere of a rose color. It was really a web of light. A great sensation of lightness filled them, but it turned to dread when they saw Tomber take a heavy metal bar and throw it at them. But the bar struck against the sphere as though it were a wall of steel and fell clanging to the floor.

Tomber laughed. "That was well for a first attempt. It worked well."

Quickly returning to his apparatus, he caused the sphere to disappear. Then he bade them rest.

"When you leave the Valley, this sphere will disappear and be useless, but I hope it will save your lives from the immediate danger. However, you are not out yet, and you will be forced to use all your reserve of courage, and death will avoid you. Tomorrow I would like you to examine the Valley thoroughly. I want you to see the most monumental failure that man has achieved. May the Holy Ones have you in their keeping."

The Valley of the Ray

THE next morning, as they emerged from the House of the Ray, Clare spoke to Ilias. "Why did you say that the only entrance to the Valley in the face of the rays was over the cliffs?"

"Because that is the only way I knew till Father told me where I would find the opening in the cliff-side, and even now I do not know the inner entrance."

"It is across the square from the great archway. Let's go and see if it is still open. What do you say, boys?"

"Looking for a getaway already, are you?" Sandy grinned. "All right, come along."

A brisk walk brought them to the arch and they started across the square. The air was cool and pleasant, the green canopy overhead cast a welcome shadow, the impact of the living rays was invigorating. "What is the canopy made of?" asked Tom when they were halfway to their destination.

"What is a canopy?" asked Ilias.

"That fluttering thing overhead."

"Oh, that is only light."

"I thought the rays underneath were light. They do not look the same."

Ilias shook her head a little impatiently. "Well, they are. The canopy is negative, the rays positive. They are generated every morning, but that is permanent. As long as the cone endures, so will the canopy."

"Oh, I see." Which they didn't, but the explanation seeming sufficient to Ilias, there was nothing more to be said, especially as they were up against the bare, blank wall of the cliff in which not a crack was visible.

"Are you sure it was here you entered?" she asked.

"Absolutely. And look here." Stooping, Clare picked up from the grass at his feet and held out to them a long strand of the thick white cloth of which his sandal thongs were made. "I pulled this off just before the cone began its performance and we had to retreat. You see, one of these is still narrower than the other." The evidence was unmistakable, but so was the immobility of the cliff face, and after a moment the girl turned away.

"I expect it is one of Father's mysteries," she said. "If so, it's no use talking about it. He won't explain unless he wants to, and he mostly doesn't. Let us get on."

"Now what do you wish to see first?" she asked as they approached the edge of the square.

"Not knowing anything at all about your life here, we couldn't say. Suppose you take us where you think is the greatest interest. We can't see it all in one day, anyway, can we?"

"You may have to," was the cryptic reply. "Very well, I guess we will take the houses first, and then the fields."

Climbing from the floor of the valley by a stairway in the cliff face, they crossed the river on a footbridge of a single great span and were almost immediately at the first of the dwellings, which were almost square, with flat roofs, and reached by outside stairways. Also, they were equipped with innumerable arches, doors and windows, and appeared to be carved from a single block of stone; but as many of them covered acres, the visitors could not quite see how it had been done. Clare ventured to ask their guide, but she shook her head. "Only father and Robern know," she said, "and they say there is no need to use the process now, as we have houses enough."

"What process?"

"Making living stones merge into each other as they are laid, so that the buildings never decay or fall apart."

"I see."

"These houses are all alike in their appointments," she continued. "When you have seen one, you have seen them all, except that some are much larger than others."

They entered a lofty hall which stretched before them to the farther side of the house. Two other halls crossed it at right angles. There were no visible openings into the corridors, but Ilias laid a hand on the wall nearest her, and a great block of stone dropped to the floor level, disclosing a room some sixteen feet square. On the floor was a white rug with delicate embroidery of flowers and plants. A low couch stood between two of the window openings, overlooking the valley. A stone about three feet high was built into the wall and on it were several vases and ornaments, mostly of gold. In one corner the walls projected so as to make a recess some four feet square and in this were hung a number of robes, with sandals on the floor below. Over the stone—which served as a dressing table let into the wall—was an oval of pale green, which shimmered in the light from the windows.

Some Information

STEPPING nearer, they saw that it was a mirror, flawless and lovely. "What is this made of?" asked Clare.

"Emerald."

"What? An emerald that size? How could that be?"

"I don't know. These houses were built centuries ago, as I told you, and that was here when I took this room."

"This is your room?"

"Certainly. I could not venture to show you anyone's else without permission, which they probably would not give."

"I thought you lived at the House."

"Oh, no. No one does but members of the Council, Robern and Father. All the others live here."

"Please tell us how this thing is managed," begged Sandy.

"I guess I'd better begin with the babies. They are taken at birth to the nursery of the House of the Ray. There they are tended by experts until they are eight. Then they are supposed to begin to take part in some activity of the colony.

"Plans are kept of the houses in the archives so they know where there are vacant rooms. The new member of the colony goes to each in turn and selects the room that seems most desirable. And they live there till they go back to the Ray."

"What happens when they mate?"

"They stay at the mating house for a week, then return to their rooms. I'll point it out presently."

They were now standing outside the building and Clare wanted to know where they ate. "In the lower halls of the Ray. The food is all prepared there."

They now made the circuit of the row of houses and found Ilias was right, at least as regarded the exteriors. They were exactly alike. Halfway down the arc she pointed out the mating house, but Clare murmured to Sandy that they must find it by instinct, as it looked like the others.

"Can anybody get into these homes at any time?" asked Tom.

"Certainly, but we never intrude on each other. We all resent it, so we don't visit each other."

"I see. The golden rule working again."

"In reverse order," Tom agreed.

Ilias beckoned them on. "Come," she said. "We will just have time to rest. After lunch you can see the later ones at the House."

CHAPTER VI

A Crisis

A SOFT-TONED gong announced noon and they went back to the House. When Ilias would have left them, they detained her with a question. "Do the people of the Ray eat together?"

"How disgusting! Certainly not. Each has his own eating room where food is brought to him from the kitchens. I don't see how anyone can bear to have another see him eat."

"You will when you get into the world. They do it all the time there. They even get up banquets where they do nothing else but eat."

The girl threw up her hands and hurried away, the men restraining their mirth till she was out of hearing. Then Sandy drawled, as he led the way to their table, "We wouldn't have to talk so much about manners if these customs were universal."

The next morning as they were talking with Ilias a wild clangor of bells that seemed to rock the very air broke from the House of the Ray. She turned swiftly. "Come, we must get back to Father at once. The Council has risen."

Sandy drew a long breath and spoke in an undertone to his companions as they followed her. "Something's due to break soon."

"Looks like it."

As usual, they met no one in the halls or corridors, but there was a tenseness in the atmosphere that could be felt. The sparks from the serpent door were rushing upward in a perfect shower, the green of the walls was intensified. Tomber, after his usual greeting, began without ceremony. "My friends, the Council has decided on a very drastic measure, so drastic that I know it emanated from the brain of my half-brother. The measure would doubtless produce some results if there were time to carry it out, but—" a wave of the hand dismissed the speculation.

"And the measure?" asked Sandy.

"The council will demand my records, so that they may know the ages of the women of the valley. Then they are going to compel all women under twenty-five to mate with

young men of approximately the same age."

"Yes, Ilias for himself and Marial and Arial for his two best friends."

Tomber smiled. "How did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"The thing's obvious. You didn't wish your daughters to mate in the valley, and Ilias told us that Carent had prevented Robern from bothering her about it. You bring us here as possible escorts for your daughters to the outside and Robern promptly discovers the alarming shortage of children, calls a council and announces a new policy. A fool could reason it out."

For a few minutes there was silence, then Clare asked, "Are the people going to consent?"

"That remains to be seen. The proclamation will be made at the sunset ceremony."

"If they don't?"

Tomber spread out his hands. "Then," he said, "things will happen as was foretold, but you and my children will be out of it."

"And the alternative?" asked Tom.

A Visit

TOMBER rose. "Again the prophecy will run its course, but you will have to assist us in the working of it. Your lives will not be in danger until I give you the signal. Meanwhile a policy of non-resistance will serve you best. It will give you an opportunity to see the working out of Robern's plans. Above all, don't became panic-stricken."

"We'll try not to, sir. In fact I am anxious to give friend Robern a surprise." Clare said earnestly. "He's too fresh."

"Then farewell for the present. You undoubtedly will see Robern tonight, if the people accept his proposition. Otherwise, I don't know what he will do."

They had finished their dinner and were looking out over the darkening valley, when Tom rubbed his eyes, looked intently at the window space in front of him, then rubbed them again. "Fellows," he cried, "notice anything in front of the windows?"

"Just discovered it, Tom? It has been gathering for some minutes."

"The deuce it has. What is it, anyway?"

"A little tribute from Robern. Merely making sure we will be here when he wants us."

"Black light?"

"Of course."

"What a joke. Let's call up the other, and—" Sandy shook his head.

"Remember Tomber's advice. No resistance. It isn't inconveniencing us. We'll be asleep in a few minutes, anyway, unless—Ah, we are about to be visited."

"How do you know?"

"Felt the vibrations."

A formal tap on the door followed, and Sandy called, "Enter."

As they expected, Robern strode in attended by three others who, they guessed, were members of the Council. All, except their leader, had black eyes and yellow hair. After surveying them keenly for a moment, Robern asked, "How did you men come into our valley?"

"You might tell us first," Clare suggested, sitting down on the edge of the table, "who you are and by what authority you ask such a question."

"I am Robern, leader of the people of the Ray, and these are my Council."

Clare rose with a single exclamation of "Oh" and went to his chair by the window. The action was rude, as Clare meant it to be, and brought a frown to Robern's face. Sandy took up the conversation, "The story is a long one. Won't you be seated?"

"I prefer to stand."

"As you will." Sandy then told the story of his father's encounter with one of their number and the legacy he had left his son, with an injunction to find the hidden valley.

"That is all very well, but how did you enter?"

"Thru the cliff."

"Impossible, there is no opening in the cliff."

"Have you looked lately?" Clare twisted his head around to ask the question, but Robern ignored him.

"I want to know what man of our people was traitor enough to aid you in invading our sacred valley." His tone was impatient.

"None. We came in alone."

"You are lying to me."

"Here, now." Clare rose and came toward the group, but Sandy motioned him back. He strode to the door and threw it open. "Your room is better than your company," he said. "Good night."

Robern retreated a step, and his tone was more civil as he said, "Very well; I'll grant that you may have entered through an opening of which we know nothing. But even so, how did you get into the House of the Ray?"

Sandy yawned. "The doors are always open. Why not?"

Robern dropped his questions. "After all, it does not matter how you got here. The point is, I order you to leave the Valley at once."

"And if we don't?"

"You pass into the Great Ray at the sunrise ceremony tomorrow."

"Ha, ha!" Sandy's mirth was genuine. "Do you think we

are afraid of the Great Ray? Nonsense. Keep it to frighten your children with. I think we'll stay."

"That is final?"

"Quite."

"Very well. We'll call for you tomorrow morning."

"Be sure to close the door gently," commanded Clare, but it was already closing behind their visitor.

"Lovable character," sighed Tom. "So gentle and polite."

"I wish Sandy had seen fit to teach him manners, forcibly." Clare's expression was mournful.

"I did feel like it. He irritated me."

"Really! I wonder what my fate would be if I called you a liar."

Tomber Revolts

BUT Sandy only laughed and threw himself on his couch. "Let's get to sleep, boys. We're going to need all our wits tomorrow."

He woke gently, some hours later, to find the room light and Tomber standing beside him. The priest motioned for quiet as he looked at the others still sleeping heavily. When he spoke it was in a tone barely audible.

"This is goodbye, my friends. I have brought you a map which will guide you back to your own people." He unrolled a scroll on which Sandy saw "food stored" marked in various places, as well as a plainly defined trail. He looked a question and Tomber explained, "This is the way by which our agents used to reach the coast. You will find little difficulty in following it. Also I leave with you for Clare the golden dagger he admired.

"Tomorrow morning before daybreak they will come for you. My daughters and I will follow later. When I give the signal of the upraised hand they will join you. I will create the globe of protection. You will need it. I want you to watch as closely as you may the form your pursuer takes. It will interest you.

"And now . . " he bent above Sandy and slowly touched the crown of his hair and on his forehead, whereat he was seized with such shuddering delight he scarcely heard the rest of the sentence, "May the Holy One, the Great One, Who holds this earth in His palm, ever have you in His holy aura. Farewell!" The light went out, the door closed gently and Tomber was gone.

Sandy woke the others the next morning as Robern opened the door and beckoned them to join him. "Follow me," he said.

"With pleasure." The three members of the Council accompanied them into an elevator. Up and up rose the car, till it seemed as if they were leaving the earth entirely. Finally

it stopped and they moved through a doorway on to the second terrace of the House, high above the valley, close under the fluttering canopy, and very close to the Great Ray. The ray was behaving in an extraordinary fashion. It had increased during the night and burned with an unceasing roar that made communication difficult. Many were the uneasy glances of the multitude crowding the terraces below them, but they remained in their places; indeed, there was nothing else to do.

Robern was giving his orders to the Council, and had motioned the three intruders to follow him to the top, when a commotion began on the fourth terrace. The assembled people crowded back from an elevator opening as four figures came from it. Murmurs swelled to cries and then to acclaim as the stately form of Tomber was recognized. He raised a hand in greeting, then slowly mounted to the top where Robern stood as if frozen, and the boys stared at the three young men behind the priest in amazement till Sandy whispered, "Ilias, Marial and Arial." They were dressed in replicas of the costumes they themselves had discarded to enter the valley.

The clamor died when Tomber and Robern came face to face on the topmost terrace. Tomber spoke, "My brother, the end has come. Your ways and mine are far apart and it shall be shown today who is the stronger."

"Why have you come forth?" demanded his brother.

"Because today you and I and all the people of the Ray look our last upon our Lord, the Sun—save these my daughters, who go forth to work their destiny elsewhere."

"They shall not."

"What is to prevent?"

"I shall. I have decreed that within the hour the strangers will enter the Ray, and these, thy daughters, will become mates of men worthy of them."

Tomber turned swiftly and raised his hand as if in greeting to his guests, and only they realized that it was farewell. Then he laughed. "My brother, does it come to your mind that I was ever thwarted in that which I had determined to do?"

"Not when it was you and I alone that contended; but today you oppose not only myself but the Council assembled, and the entire people of the Ray who have accepted our dicta. We shall prevail."

The End

FOR a moment Tomber looked down at the multitudes which thronged below him. Then he raised his arms aloft and above the roar of the cone his clear voice rang out in some tongue the assembled peoples seemed to recognize. Panic-stricken they surged backward down the terraces they

had so lately climbed. Just as he began to chant, there was a change in the Great Ray. Its whirling ceased and the colors, instead of commingling as of old, now shot up in wide ribbons toward the zenith. As they noticed this, Tomber turned to his guests, "Farewell, may the blessing of the Great Ones Whose love enfolds all things be upon you and have you in Their holy keeping. The hour strikes. Go!"

The attention of the people had been on Tomber and the flame. Now at his words they glanced at the strangers and a low murmur of fear and amazement rose. Side by side with them were standing the three daughters of the Ray and enclosing the six was a great globe of intense rose flame, shot through and through with whirling gold. The group raised their hands in farewell to the man who had blessed them, then turning, started down the first of the terraces, as Tomber's last command reached them through the roaring of flame. "Go down the outside very quickly. Already the House burns with fire."

Then Robern acted. Swiftly he turned and spoke a short sentence in the same ancient tongue Tomber had used. Out from the heart of the Ray rushed a great shaft of flame and seemed to be flung against the rosy globe below.

Men and women crowded back from its path, and Sandy gasped as he saw the flame with clawing fingers probing to find a weak point in the globe through which it could penetrate.

But step by step, calmly, evenly, though with hearts that had quickened their beat, and wills stretched to the utmost to keep their protection about them, the men descended. The three girls remained in the middle, now and then flinging an arm upward to be sure their protection held, as the hideous menace of flame leaped into the air and plunged downward upon the globe, and, spreading out, seemed as though it were trying to crush the globe to pieces.

At length they reached the floor of the valley and quickened their pace as they felt a slight tremor as of an earthquake under their feet. Not till they were up against the cliff face did it slowly begin to open, but a new diversion called all eyes to the top of the House.

Robern was still concentrating on his work of hate, when Tomber stepped to his side and gripped him round the waist. For an instant they were eye to eye and he read his fate in Tomber's eyes, for he began to struggle furiously. Inch by inch, closer and closer to the upspringing flower of flame, Tomber forced him.

And now Robern forgot his flame of malice and, released from his direction, it rushed upward to rejoin its source. Many of the people who had crowded back to give it room, were once more in its path as they watched the struggle on the topmost terrace, and the menace gripped them, tore them,

and they withered and died, drooping like scorched flowers on the steps of the House.

Tomber saw the leaping, snarling force coming, and turning, placed his brother in its path. It grasped its creator but even as he screamed for help, he died and the thing sprang from him into the Ray. The last thing the boys saw was Tomber, who, with his last access of strength, had lifted his brother's body and with it clasped to his breast stepped backward into the cone.

Speech became impossible, but Ilias urgently motioned them into the cleft. They obeyed and with another earthquake tremor it shut together, leaving them in semi-darkness but a quiet that permitted speech. "Let us get outside quickly," Ilias said. "Father wanted us to see the end of the Valley and its people."

Once more on the hillside, looking through the cleft, they saw that the fluttering green canopy had been snatched away, and the shafts of the Great Cone had dropped to the top of the cliffs.

Then pitilessly, surely, the fires swept the valley. These placid people, who from childhood had known nothing but the Ray as a beneficent power, had their delicate bodies literally burnt to cinders, and the thing which for so many centuries had been their preserver was now their executioner.

Then the House of the Ray began to rock on its foundations; it swayed, cracked, and great portions of the terraces fell, carrying their dying multitudes into the hell below. It rocked more and more, the cone enveloping and pushing it from within, and suddenly it vanished, crumbling into the dust from which it came.

At length after hours of destruction, the cone, having exhausted itself, tried to rise once more, wavered, shook—recoiled, doubled upon itself, and then, gathering together the remnant of its strength, leaped bodily from the earth, and seemed to vanish into the burning sky above. From the hole it had left, burning lava began to flow, gradually spreading out into the whole valley, which presently was full of its scorching breath.

Then, and not till then, did the survivors prepare to leave. They paused for a last look at the place they had called home; then Ilias with a smile laid her hand on Sandy's arm. "Let us," she said, "go out into the world where men grow old."

THE END

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